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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Twenty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 25 April 2001, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 6) (continued)

Second periodic report of Venezuela (E/1990/6/Add.19; E/C.12/Q/VEN/1; written replies to the list of issues prepared by the Government of Venezuela (document without a reference number); HRI/COR/1/Add.3) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Venezuela resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited members of the delegation of Venezuela to continue their replies to questions 24 to 31 of the list of issues, relating to articles 9 and 10 of the Covenant.

3. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that his delegation would respond to the remaining questions on social security, land ownership and statistics relating to children.

4. Ms. TORRES DÍAZ (Venezuela) said that, regarding whether trade unions could limit freedom of employment, the previous National Constitution had contained a trade union clause, incorporated into the 1990 Organic Labour Act, whereby subject to agreement between workers and employers, a maximum of 75 per cent of enterprise staff could be nominated by a trade union. The trade union clause had been eliminated from the new National Constitution and, in the discussions currently in progress on collective labour agreements the parties concerned were trying to reach an accord on eliminating the percentage provision or deleting the clause altogether.

5. As to wage fixing, for cases where the Tripartite Commission proposed a minimum wage level and the National Congress was not in agreement with that level, the mechanisms provided by the 1990 Organic Labour Act had been rescinded during a partial reform of the Act carried out in 1997. Where the Tripartite Commission proposed a minimum wage level to the National Executive, the Executive must consider that proposal and establish a minimum wage through a decision of the Ministry of Labour.

6. Article 88 of the National Constitution recognized the work of women in the home and guaranteed them social security coverage. No compulsory contribution existed for such workers since the guiding principle was one of universality in that social security benefits were available to all citizens, irrespective of their ability to make contributions, which were covered by employers and the State where employees were unable to pay themselves. Regarding the percentage of the population covered by mandatory social security, the system was regulated by a mandatory social insurance law which was currently being revised, as indeed was all related legislation in the light of the new Constitution. The previous Constitution had established mandatory social security for all workers bound by labour contracts or subordinated to an employer. Social security of that kind was optional for informal-sector workers, and where applicable, was conditional on their being able to make the necessary contributions.

7. In general terms, social security benefits were available to all, irrespective of origin or sex, within the requisite legal framework and about 49 per cent of formal-sector workers currently received coverage.

8. Ms. LÓPEZ DE PENSO (Venezuela), on the subject of land ownership, said a great deal of land in Venezuela was unused. However, as in other democratic countries the principle of land ownership stemmed from social necessity but was subordinated to the fulfilment of legal requirements. Any man or woman who required a plot for cultivation purposes had to submit a project to the Government, which then determined whether or not the land should be allotted to him or her, subject to its legal acquisition from the current proprietor. In short, the State could never assume individual rights but persons submitting projects must ensure that all elements of the law were satisfied. In Venezuela the principle of private property was respected.

9. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that the figure according to which 40,000 children in Venezuela had been the victims of sexual abuse bore no relation to reality in the country. He referred specifically to the national system of child protection and to the fact that Venezuela had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. Under the Organic Act on the Protection of Children and Adolescents, enacted in 2000, the rights of all young people were guaranteed. Administrative bodies to enforce those guarantees existed in the form of councils at national and municipal level, 50 per cent of whose members came from State bodies and the remaining 50 per cent from civil society. If such an alarming figure had corresponded to reality, appropriate measures would have been taken by those councils. He asked what the source of the figure was.

10. Mr. MARCHÁN-ROMERO requested clarification on the rationale for the promulgation of the new National Constitution. In the chapter on the rights of indigenous peoples reference was made to fundamental efforts to achieve a balance between respect for those rights and the domestic legislation in place. It was stated that a normative system of reparations was applied in order to achieve that balance. What was the essence of that system?

11. Mr. GRISSA said that the source of the figures relating to child victims of sexual abuse was the 1999 human rights report of the State Department of the United States of America.

12. Ms. LÓPEZ DE PENSO (Venezuela) said that within the domestic normative system of reparations for indigenous peoples, respect for the traditions and customs of such peoples was guaranteed by a council of elders. In a much-publicized case, the Yanomami group had been used as a subject of research by a North American anthropologist. The actual truth of the situation remained to be ascertained, although it was clear that a ceremony had taken place where all the indigenous people concerned had organized cremations after which the ashes had been consumed in secrecy so that the elder of the group could perpetuate the experiences of the deceased.

13. Reparation methods were detailed in the National Constitution and comprised criminal and civil aspects since they were designed to compensate for human and social damage and irreparable harm caused to ecosystems.

14. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Venezuela to respond to the questions raised regarding articles 11 and 12 of the Covenant (questions 32 to 37).

15. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that the responses to the list of issues raised contained updated statistics on the distribution of poor households, measured against unsatisfied basic needs. According to the 2000 census, 30 per cent of households lived in poverty and 10 per cent in extreme poverty. The information obtained from the census was regularly updated by household surveys. It was true that a housing shortage existed in Venezuela, although over the past few years the Government had endeavoured to deal with the problem as one of its major priorities. The subject of one of its principal enactments was the availability of loans for workers in the housing sector, and the overall number of such households granted housing credits had more than doubled in the past year, while loans granted by the private sector had increased by 16 per cent. The National Housing Council had also achieved a 2.2 per cent increase in the granting of such credits.

16. The PROINSOL programme had also achieved excellent results as part of a social investment fund. The Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) had also granted a US$ 140 million loan designed to improve housing services and the World Bank had provided financing for the PROMUEVA programme. Since the beginning of 2000 more than 50,000 new housing units had been completed.

17. Turning to question 34 of the list of issues, he said that during the state of emergency declared in December 1999, the Government had undertaken reconstruction as a matter of priority in the State of Bargas. Major investments had been made, which had enabled families to be transferred to other States where they had been provided with food, housing and health care. A social fund established had achieved significant community development, including the temporary employment of affected people. It had been the first time that, in Venezuela, the State had intervened on such a massive scale to resolve a crisis, and as a result the problems of flood victims had been dealt with in a very short space of time. Considerable assistance had also been received from the international community which had made it possible to rebuild the national infrastructure and cater for the basic needs of the victims.

18. Ms. LÓPEZ DE PENSO (Venezuela) said that teenage pregnancies were considered to be a social problem which was a matter for the public health authorities. With the entry into force of the Organic Act on the Protection of Children and Adolescents, young people had become full citizens whose rights were guaranteed by the National Constitution.

19. No tradition of abortion existed in Venezuela, where 80 per cent of the population were Catholic. In social terms, abortion was rejected and was admissible only for therapeutic purposes where the life of a mother or child was in danger. Clandestine abortions were punishable under the Penal Code, though they were likely to go undetected unless, for example, they led to the death of the pregnant woman.

20. The press publicized sexual education programmes provided for children, which helped to raise awareness of illegal abortions and their harmful health and social consequences. Where a mother decided voluntarily to continue with a pregnancy, it was the State's duty to protect the child before it was born even where the mother was a teenager. To that end, health programmes

including gynaecological care and psychological support were in place, since above all it was necessary to protect a mother's situation and make it easier for her to continue her pregnancy, despite the related moral and ethical stigma, and to enable a child to take its place in society.

21. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that the responses to the list of issues provided up-to-date statistics on maternal and child mortality up to the year 2000. Strenuous efforts had been made by the Government to keep maternal mortality low and to achieve a substantial reduction in infant mortality. In 2000, the figure had stood at less than 20 deaths per 1,000 births and was evidence of a successful child and adolescent health-care policy.

22. Ms. LÓPEZ DE PENSO (Venezuela), responding to question 37 of the list of issues, said that the National Constitution served as a legal basis, since it referred to protection of the environment as an essential right for everyone. Environmental education was therefore a compulsory subject at all levels of the school system. As to oil spills, environmental impact studies were provided for in cases which occurred, attention also being given to their social and cultural aspects. In a well-known case where oil had been spilt from a tanker in Lake Maracaibo, the Public Prosecutor's Office had undertaken an investigation jointly with the Ministry of the Environment, imposed fines on those responsible and instituted measures to restore the previous situation.

23. Similarly, before the current National Constitution had come into force, concessions had existed allowing coal to be mined in certain areas, no account being taken of whether the resources in question were renewable. Since the introduction of the new Constitution, however, respect for the environment had become an important issue inasmuch as the environment was deemed to belong to everyone. Evidence of environmental degradation for personal gain existed throughout the world and, for that reason, the Venezuelan authorities sought to establish protection of the environment as a basic right and duty. The Public Prosecutor's Office was studying the "permissibility" of economic and environmental damage in terms of its impact on ethnic groups. A law relating to environmental crime also existed, categorizing relevant offences and prescribing penalties.

24. Mr. PILLAY noted that according to the delegation of Venezuela only 10 per cent of the population lived in extreme poverty. That figure contrasted sharply with the 1999 United States State Department report which had indicated that 80 per cent of the population lived on or below the poverty line. Likewise, the 1998 report on Health in the Americas issued by the Pan-American Health Organization had asserted that, in 1994, 27 per cent of the population of Venezuela had unsatisfied basic needs and 21 per cent lived in extreme poverty. Had there really been such a dramatic improvement in the situation in the meantime? The information provided was corroborated in the report by FIAN International which noted a qualitative and quantitative decline in the food intake of the population as a result of poverty. FIAN had also cited four cases where there had been an intrusion on the habitat of indigenous peoples, with devastating consequences for their right to food and health care.

25. As to forced evictions, the Committee's General Comment No. 7 stated that forced eviction was "the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families and/or communities from the homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection". FIAN had also cited a case

of 103 peasant families that had been violently evicted from the land they had occupied for 17 years. Despite the provisions of the law on agrarian reform, the Defender of the People had not acted on behalf of the individuals who had suffered as a result of the eviction. Venezuela had thus breached a provision of the Covenant by failing to comply with the guidelines contained in the Committee's General Comment No. 7, supplying no statistics or information on the flagrant cases of forced eviction.

26. It was stated in paragraphs 201-204 of the second report that the gross housing deficit of 900,000 units had been expected to exceed the million mark by 1998. He wished to know whether the situation had improved or whether, as was more likely, it had further deteriorated. He urged the delegation to reply to his focused and detailed questions in like manner. He also called for a reply to his earlier question as to why, in a recent case, the Supreme Court of Justice had opted to address the peripheral question of environmental laws rather than that of the indigenous peoples' right to food.

27. Mr. RIEDEL complimented the delegation on the well-presented health indicators provided, which clearly showed where the defects lay, although the figures only covered the period up to 1994. The report "Health in the Americas" prepared by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) had referred to uncontrolled private-sector growth, with areas previously regulated by the Government being increasingly handed over to the private sector, making for a lower level of health protection. He would welcome the delegation's comments on the Economist Intelligence Unit's assertion that most patients were obliged to pay for medication and that hospitals could refuse treatment unless evidence of ability to pay was provided. What had the Government done since the preparation of the report to improve the health services provided to the most vulnerable groups and least privileged areas? He failed to see how the measures enumerated in paragraph 250, all of which presupposed access, could help the indigenous population, which, as stated in paragraph 249, was widely dispersed and lacked reasonable access to the health-service infrastructure. What measures were in place to improve that situation? Education of small groups living in forest areas could be one useful approach.

28. He asked about the availability of the extremely expensive multiple-drug "cocktail" used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS and whether the authorities had sought international financial support or negotiated reduced prices for drugs with the pharmaceutical corporations. Also, what practical action was being taken to mitigate the catastrophic effects of oil spills on the countryside, especially in highly industrial Maracaibo.

29. Mr. GRISSA, while realizing that pollution posed a major problem for all oil-producing countries, wished to know its real effects on the environment and the health of the population. France had experienced a similar oil spill to the one in Maracaibo and, despite spending millions of dollars, had failed to clear it completely. While Venezuela might prosecute those responsible, it was more important for the Committee to know what practical action was being taken.

30. Mr. THAPALIA said that according to information he had received the average daily calorie intake in Venezuela was constantly falling. He asked for statistics concerning the daily calories consumed by the vulnerable groups and wished to know what the Government was

doing to alleviate the food crisis. Could the delegation inform the Committee of the proportion of people living below the poverty line and of the measures in place to alleviate poverty, especially critical poverty, which had quadrupled during the 1990s?

31. Mr. KOUZNETSOV said that, although he would like the delegation to supply precise figures on the State's health-care expenditure, it was the actual delivery of care that was most important. In any event, public expenditure on health care appeared to be constantly declining as more - and more expensive - services were provided by the private sector. The Committee would see that the Government was fulfilling the pertinent provision of the Covenant if the delegation could declare unconditionally that the Government was increasing its health-care spending. If it could not, he would be grateful for any information it could supply.

32. Mr. CEAUSU pointed out that the share of GDP spent on health had fallen from 5.7 per cent to 1.8 per cent in 1995. It was interesting that 71 per cent of the health-care budget was spent on hospital care, with a mere 12.6 per cent on outpatient services, a situation that could have long-term consequences. In order for the Committee to judge the quality of health care provided, it would be useful to be informed whether rural hospitals and dispensaries were served by doctors other than general practitioners.

33. While the health indicators tabulated in paragraph 222 of the report were obviously out of date, they showed that the infant and maternal mortality rates were alarmingly high, although the former was stated in paragraph 223 to be below the internationally acceptable average. He cautioned against measuring national statistics by such averages, rather than focusing on actual national needs. The reasons for the high maternal mortality rate were understandable, but not acceptable. It was incumbent on the authorities to enhance the level of such services and increase its currently derisory expenditure on outpatient care. He asked the delegation to supply figures on the incidence of new cases of tuberculosis, as opposed to the percentages given in the report.

34. Disturbed at the fact that only 20 per cent of pregnant women received antenatal care and that, for legal reasons, unmarried adolescents received none at all, he enjoined the authorities to ensure that all pregnant women had access to available medical services. He also asked what the government health-care programmes listed in paragraph 250 of the report consisted of and what funds were allocated to its tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse programmes in particular.

35. On the subject of environmental protection, the extent of land pollution by solid wastes was disturbing. While proper disposal was the responsibility of the municipalities, the central Government should intensify its measures - including sanctions - against local authorities that reneged on their duties.

36. Mr. SADI said that two decades earlier Venezuela had had an excellent public health service, which, owing to corruption and shrinking budgets, had reached a state of virtual collapse, in which 60 per cent of the nation's hospitals were in need of repair. Would the delegation corroborate or refute the impression that the situation was deteriorating rather than improving? Also, given the health hazards inherent in the use of leaded petrol, especially to children, did the authorities intend to introduce a policy for the large-scale use of unleaded petrol?

37. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) said that, while many of the statistics provided were pre-1999, some were still valid. Some points raised by Committee members referred to the period before 1999, the year in which the Government had taken office; the delegation could only discuss policies established since that time. The information on poverty provided in the report had been obtained by the basic needs method applied in the 1990 census. Replying to questions from Mr. Riedel and Mr. Thapalia, he said the Committee had not requested information on poverty trends; however, the authorities would provide such information on the basis of the household sample data up to 2000.

38. Income statistics were based on income growth and source of income. With help from UNDP, the country had embarked on its Human Development Index, which would be completed later in the year. The authorities were not withholding information; they had simply understood the Committee to have called for updated information. However, they would provide the Committee with all the data at their disposal. With regard to the housing deficit, the Government, through the National Housing Council, was in the process of large-scale house construction. An urban development fund had recently been created and housing and services had greatly improved.

39. Ms. FRANCIA (Venezuela) said that poverty in Venezuela was part of the increasingly high level of poverty worldwide, a sign of the world economic system's failure to eliminate that evil. The situation in Venezuela was critical. The previous legislation had displayed many shortcomings, and the current Government had initially concentrated on the social dimension.

40. The new Constitution was strong on social content and reflected current realities and needs. Venezuela recognized various levels of poverty: the bottom levels were "appalling" and "extreme" poverty, covering people who lived in totally unacceptable conditions. The situation was very difficult to resolve, but the Government was making every effort to alleviate it. Venezuela's social policy reflected a vision of social security and aimed at improving Venezuelans' living standards. The Government had applied to international organizations for technical cooperation in that area.

41. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela), replying to questions from Committee members regarding social and health expenditure, said that the data provided in the report were for the period up to 1998. Up-to-date official statistics on social expenditure would be sent to the Committee. Health expenditure had indeed declined up to 1998, but the 1999 budget reform had made it possible to increase expenditure on education and, in particular, health. Funds earmarked for health had increased still further in the 2000/2001 budget.

42. Until recently, there had been a serious problem of institutions beginning to introduce fees for health care. In 2000, however, programmes had been put in place to guarantee free health care. They were funded out of the regular budgets of the Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Venezuelan Social Security Administration. Similarly, medicines were now distributed free to the poorest sectors through a special programme.

43. A significant percentage of the health sector had been decentralized to the states, which administered hospitals and outpatient clinics, for example. The Ministry of Health and Social Development was responsible for overall health policy.

44. In general, although not all the problems had been resolved, there had been a reversal of former health policies. As a result of the budget increases, for example, the growth of the private health sector had been halted.

45. The statistics on outpatient clinics in the report needed adjusting, because when the system had started the population had been 20 per cent urban and 80 per cent rural, whereas it was currently the other way round. Some of the "rural" clinics were in what had become peri-urban areas.

46. In 2000, Venezuela had introduced an integrated care system designed to cater not merely for children or mothers but for whole families. The Ministry of Health and Social Development had also launched a sexual and reproductive health programme that was more comprehensive than the previous mother-child health-care programme and made it possible to care for pregnant women - both before and after the birth - and to monitor healthy children and the family as a whole. The aim of the programme was to reduce teenage pregnancies and maternal and infant mortality. Community health education had been introduced for mothers and families and in some cases was run by mothers. That had reduced infant mortality and was having some impact on teenage pregnancies. Moreover, maternal mortality rates for the first quarter of 2001 had been reduced to 17 per thousand registered live births.

47. It was not true that pregnant teenagers had no access to health care for legal reasons.

48. Lastly, it was the policy of the Ministry of Energy and Mining to begin introducing unleaded petrol as part of the Government's commitment to the well-being of the environment.

49. Ms. LÓPEZ DE PENSO (Venezuela) said the Government viewed the environment from a worldwide rather than a merely national perspective and, through the Ministry of the Environment, took a basically preventive approach to reducing environmental hazards. One example was the patrolling of waters at risk of pollution by the National Customs Service, which was a branch of the National Guard. One aspect of that programme was the imposition of preventive measures in the area of oil transport, including pipelines and tankers, in order to avoid polluting sensitive areas. In the event of non-compliance with the regulations, penalties ranged from heavy fines to seizure of a ship.

50. The oil spill in Lake Maracaibo had been fully and adequately dealt with by the environmental authorities. She pointed out that no new penalties, even of an administrative nature, could be imposed without a basis in law, even when the aim was to rectify environmental damage or improve the environment.

51. Mr. SALTRON (Venezuela), replying to a question regarding allegations that the Government had evicted peasants from their land, said the Office of the Defender of the People had branches in all states and there had been no reports of such government evictions since the Office had been established. There had been similar reports of thousands of cases of sexual abuse or of extrajudicial killings: such allegations were exaggerated and were not acceptable. The only evictions that had taken place were of persons engaged in illegal mining in Bolivar State.

52. The CHAIRPERSON invited comments from Committee members on items 38 to 41 of the list of issues.

53. Mr. MALINVERNI noted that, according to information received, 50 per cent of the resources allocated to education went to higher and university-level education and 50 per cent to the primary and secondary levels. If that was true, he wondered whether it would not be better to prioritize the primary and secondary sectors. According to some sources, a series of strikes had meant that pupils had been able to attend school on only 90 out of the 180 school days in 1999/2000. Was that correct?

54. Lastly, he asked whether it was true that there were plans to privatize schooling and introduce a fee-paying system.

55. Mr. HUNT asked whether a Venezuelan education-for-all plan, as outlined in the Dakar Framework for Action was either envisaged or in preparation. If so, would the plan reflect articles 13 and 14 of the Covenant, and how would it be monitored? Had Venezuela considered accepting UNESCO's offer to provide technical advice and assistance in the formulation or implementation of its Dakar plan.

56. Mr. MARTYNOV requested further information on the introduction of compulsory elementary education for people living in remote regions and indigenous people. What was the rate of school attendance among such people and what was the Government doing to improve the situation? What was the Government doing to develop bilingual education for indigenous people?

57. Mr. MARCHÁN-ROMERO was also interested in the progress made on bilingual education for indigenous people. How many children, and in what populations, were now benefiting? He enquired about the state of progress of the organic law on indigenous people and how far it would conform with the ILO Convention.

58. Mr. TEXIER asked whether pre-military instruction in colleges, which had been the subject of protests by non-governmental organizations, was still mandatory and whether, under the new Constitution, young people could choose between military and social service. There had also been much criticism of a manual of pre-military instruction which incited hatred and promoted views contrary to the international conventions ratified by Venezuela. Was that manual still used in colleges?

59. Mr. SADI wanted to know what plans Venezuela had regarding the right to education and whether it intended to incorporate the jurisprudence of the Committee in the State party report.

60. Ms. BARAHONA-REIRA, referring to the second article of the Constitution, dealing with private education, asked about the methods used for regulating private education and whether a distinction was made between the supervision of the private and public sectors.

61. Ms. HANSON (Venezuela), replying to questions put by members of the Committee, said that the Government had halted the neo-liberal policy of redirecting resources from higher

education to other levels of the system, in favour of a steady rise in the overall educational budget. The information that higher education accounted for 50 per cent of the budget was inaccurate. In fact, 30 per cent went to the universities and 70 per cent to the rest of the education system. The Government was also allocating extrabudgetary funds to education in addition to increasing the regular budget. The Constitution provided for 200 days of classes per year and the Government had drawn up plans accordingly, which had been opposed by the teaching unions. Nevertheless, support among teachers for strike action had shown a marked decline and the goal of 200 days had in fact already been achieved.

62. With regard to the trend towards privatization in education, currently 80 per cent of education establishments were in the State sector and 20 per cent in the private sector. The same relative percentages of the population attended State schools and private schools respectively. The enrolment fee, or parental contribution, which had been made compulsory, had since been abolished in accordance with the right to free compulsory State schooling embodied in the Constitution. Any person found guilty of denying access to schooling to a child would be penalized by a fine equivalent to 6 months' income. The aim of the Government was to reverse the trend towards the privatization of schools and universities. Some head teachers, who had refused to abandon the enrolment fee, had been temporarily suspended.

63. Regarding the supervision of schools, the State had delegated its duty to supervise both the State and the private sector to the Ministry of Education. Various measures were in place to increase the number of inspectors available with a view to making quality education accessible to all. Better supervision was one of the two main pillars of the Government's policy to improve the quality of education. The other was teacher training, and various programmes and plans had been set up in that area. The Government had drawn up a plan to improve the quality and extend the coverage of education for excluded populations and launched flagship programmes at different levels of the education system to promote their integration.

64. Regarding technical cooperation, Venezuela had been in touch with UNESCO and other multilateral organizations. The country would appreciate assistance from any source in its efforts to provide better quality education and good educational materials.

65. Turning to the questions raised about indigenous children, she made no secret of the fact that only 34 per cent of indigenous communities had schools and that 55.6 per cent of persons between the ages of 5 and 24 did not attend any type of school. The Government was well aware of the problem and was working towards a solution by means of various schemes covering all levels from pre-school to the sixth grade and focusing on the most vulnerable groups, including those living in frontier and rural areas. The re-establishment of the directorate for indigenous education, headed by a member of an indigenous group, to oversee bilingual multicultural education had been well received.

66. Regarding compulsory military service, plans to exempt some sections of the population had been temporarily suspended pending a review of the situation in the light of the more humanistic approach of the current Government. The manual to which Mr. Texier had referred

was the result of an individual initiative and was not authorized by the Government; a circular to that effect had been sent to schools. In the interest of intellectual freedom, the Government did not wish to ban or censor the manual.

67. Replying to a question by Mr. Hunt, she said that the Government had incorporated the guidelines of international organizations and international treaties and resolutions into the basic national curriculum and extracurricular activities.

68. Mr. MARCHÁN-ROMERO enquired whether the Government had plans to introduce members of the armed forces to the substance of the Covenant.

69. Ms. HANSON (Venezuela) replied that military academies in Venezuela ran a programme as part of their regular curriculum on human rights in general and certain rights in particular. Similar courses for members of the armed forces would to be broadened to cover topics of a more general cultural nature.

70. Mr. TIMANRY (Venezuela) said that units concerned with human rights had been set up in the armed forces and in other government bodies, reflecting the importance the Government attached to human rights.

71. Mr. DURÁN (Venezuela) thanked members of the Committee for the information they had provided and for their consideration of the second periodic report of Venezuela. The delegation had attended the session voluntarily because they felt that their participation would be very beneficial. Venezuela would continue to participate in, contribute to and support such events.

72. The transformation the country had been undergoing since 1999 was peaceful and democratic. The new Constitution was fundamentally social, largely guaranteeing human, economic, political, social and cultural rights. Several chapters of the Constitution were identical with many articles of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including the articles under review. Venezuelans felt well protected by the State in virtue of the Constitution, which enjoyed broad popular support.

73. In less than two years since taking office, the Government had introduced programmes focusing on "social reconciliation" and "international equilibrium". The economy was already showing significant signs of improvement including low inflation which would have a beneficial knock-on effect on social conditions. In education, everything possible was being done to bring about improvements and guarantee access to schooling for all. Education was free, as was health care, and health indicators had also improved. In the same brief period, the Government had also had to deal with the aftermath of the unprecedented natural disaster at the end of 1999, using its own resources and with international assistance.

74. Venezuela would continue to participate in the work of the Committee and of all international bodies it considered important. The delegation would welcome comments and

recommendations from the Committee and hoped that in the short to medium term the quality of life in Venezuela would be enhanced and the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights fully implemented.

75. The CHAIRPERSON said that the concluding observations of the Committee would be made known to the delegation on the last day of the current session. She hoped that the constructive and positive relationship with Venezuela would continue.

76. The delegation of Venezuela withdrew.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.